



# Transcript

National Guard Bureau Public Affairs

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## NATIONAL GUARD ON-THE-RECORD TELEPHONIC MEDIA ROUNDTABLE

MARCH 05, 2021

TOPIC	SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS
A Year of National Guard COVID-19 Response Efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Army General Daniel R. Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau</li><li>▪ Air Force Maj. Gen. Daryl L. Bohac, the Nebraska National Guard's Adjutant General</li><li>▪ Army Maj. Gen. Bret D. Daugherty, the Washington National Guard's Adjutant General</li><li>▪ Air Force Command Chief Master Sgt. Seth Zweben, California Air National Guard's 129th Rescue Wing</li></ul>

### Background:

The National Guard has been at the forefront of the COVID-19 Pandemic response across the nation, providing support to state and local authorities. On March 5, 2020, a California National Guard helicopter crew delivered COVID-19 test kits to stranded passengers aboard the Grand Princess Cruise ship off the coast of California.

That event marks the beginning of a historic National Guard response effort. In June, more than 47,000 Guard men and women were supporting COVID operations across the country, and more than 29,300 remain on duty battling the pandemic today. Currently, governors in 36 states and territories are using the National Guard to actively vaccinate members of the civilian population.

### Introduction by Mrs. Tracy O'Grady-Walsh:

Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Tracy O'Grady, thank you for joining us today. For the past year, the National Guard has been at the forefront of COVID of the pandemic response across the nation, providing support to state and local authorities. I would like to remind everyone up front to please mute your phones, your cameras. If you're not speaking, Dyana will call on you one at a time after hearing opening statements by General Hokanson, General Bohac, Major General Daugherty and Chief Zweben. And then we're also going to show a quick video for our anniversary. I understand that many of you want to discuss other topics that are pertinent to D.C., but not to COVID. So for today, the only subjects and the only questions we'll be taking is our COVID. And if you would like to talk about other topics, we'll take a list



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of those topics at the end of the media roundtable. And we will entertain a separate media roundtable next week for other COVID not related to other topics, not related to COVID. And with that, I would like to turn it over to General Hokanson, our Chief of the National Guard here.

## Opening Statement:

Good afternoon and thank you for joining us today. I'm General Dan Hokanson and I appreciate the opportunity to give you an update on our National Guard COVID-19 operations.

A year ago today, a California National Guard Pave Hawk helicopter crew was requested to deliver COVID test kits to stranded passengers aboard the Grand Princess cruise ship off the coast of California. Command Chief Master Sergeant Seth Zweben with the 129th Rescue Wing, was one of the ground crew operators on that mission and he is joining us here today. Many of the pilots and crew from that mission are currently deployed to overseas supporting combat operations and are not able to join us.

We also have Major General Daryl Bohac, Nebraska's adjutant general, with us. In February of last year, the Nebraska National Guard was called upon to quarantine some of the first Americans affected with the COVID virus. A year later, his Soldiers and Airmen are vaccinating members of their communities across the state.

We are also joined by Major General Bret Daugherty, Washington State's adjutant general. Washington was one of the first states where the virus was confirmed, and Bret's National Guard members training, operations and response were impacted nearly immediately. Bret pioneered and shared many of the early lessons learned and shared them with the entire National Guard team. Today, his Soldiers and Airmen are providing mobile vaccination teams to help combat the virus.

In each of these states, the National Guard has been involved from the outset of this pandemic, and each of us are here to share unique perspectives about supporting such an unprecedented mission.

The COVID pandemic has affected every American. In 2020 alone, National Guard members in all 50 states, 3 territories and DC provided nearly 550 million meals to families in need; made and delivered nearly 37 million masks to frontline workers; tested nearly 13 million people; and disinfected over 9,600 nursing homes and long-term care facilities. And all of these missions have continued into 2021.

In addition to our COVID response in 2020, our National Guard men and women helped battle nearly 53,000 wildfires that damaged over 10 million acres, roughly the size of Massachusetts and Connecticut combined, and also included the dramatic and heroic helicopter rescue of over 200 civilians by the California National Guard. We were also called to save lives and expedite recovery efforts after a record breaking hurricane season when 12 named storms impacted the United States, and over 40,000 Guard members in 34 states, territories, and DC helped maintain order in their communities during civil disturbances. In total, Guard members spent over 10.3 million days serving their communities in 2020 –



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4-times more than the previous year. And on June 6th, we had over 120,000 National Guardsmen and women on duty here and around the globe.

And today, our work continues.

As I speak, over 28,500 Army and Air National Guard members, about 7 percent of our force, are supporting COVID-19 operations. We have administered over 1.9 million shots already and are administering over 135,000 shots a day at over 808 vaccination sites across the nation – and we expect that number to climb.

Working with our state and interagency partners, we will continue to help vaccinate our fellow Americans and defeat COVID-19. Every day -- for over a year now, tens-of-thousands of National Guard members - many of whom left their families and civilian jobs – have served at food banks, testing locations, warehouses and vaccination sites.

Clearly, our work is not done, and we will continue to stay for as long as we're needed. More than ever, your National Guard remains ... Always Ready, Always There!

With that, our public affairs team would like to show a short video, and once that's complete, And once that's complete, I'd like to invite Chief Zweben to talk about the March 5th mission from a year ago, followed by Major General Daryl Bohac and then Major General Bret Daugherty. So, Julian, if you could please roll the video.

Here's the link to the video we showed today: [https://youtu.be/Jr\\_geYe4Ifs](https://youtu.be/Jr_geYe4Ifs)

## Dialogue:

[Name]

[QUESTION/RESPONSE]

GEN Hokanson

OK, great. Thank you, Jillian. And we hand it over to Jeff right now from the California National Guard that's led the country.

CMSgt. Zweben

Thank you for having me today general, I would just like to say that I'm speaking on behalf of the California 129th Rescue Wing and the Airmen who made this mission happen. Before I get into the details, I just would like to set the context. So take yourselves back a year to last March and just imagine the world before we knew about the details of the virus, face masks and all the stuff that surrounds this virus and how to manage it. The mission drops for us in the afternoon of March 4th. It was unlike most missions we receive, we knew there was this cruise ship



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out at sea, that we knew it was being held up and we had heard rumors that it was not going to be allowed into the port until it was assessed. We can feel the intensity from our headquarters and we knew that we and we had a feeling that this was going to come our way. As we received the mission, and this is unlike other missions, because normally we deal with search and rescue, so as we assess the mission, you know, we were perfectly able to execute the aspects of it. But testing for the virus was a new detail that we had to figure out. When we selected our team, we had to start addressing the complexities of this virus. We have to talk to the members and make sure that they were comfortable taking this risk. We tried to select a teammate who didn't have families or have the ability to quarantine from their families potentially after the mission. We also wanted to make sure we leverage the right resources, so we pushed to have a CDC doctor launch with us to help execute the task at hand with the actual testing. In the morning of the 5th, we gathered at 0400 with a CDC doctor in the four person para rescue team to start prepping for the mission. We geared up the doctor. The doctor had a pretty strict parameters about the preparation. So we all the team, I should say, had to practice donning and doffing PPE. We had to make sure our masks were fitted properly and tested and then the team had to all execute COVID swabs. I was the lucky person who was probably one of the early people tested in this country multiple times with the foot long wooden swab that goes into your nasal passageway in your throat. So we practiced and then we prepared and then the mission was coordinated through the Coast Guard, so as we waited for the test to come up that were flown up from south of San Diego, we gen'd up the helicopters and prepared to launch. As the helicopters landed at Moffett Field in San Jose, they walked out and grabbed the test kits from the helicopter of the Coast Guard, walked over to our team, who was on HH60 Pave hawk and handed over the equipment, and away, they went on the mission at about 0900 in the morning. The team flew out to the ship, which was doing a circular pattern out at sea, about 100 miles, and they conducted a hoist insert. So two people at a time went down a hoist of the 60 and boarded the cruise ship. Once the team got situated on the ship, they donned their protective equipment and prepare to assess the patients on board. The cruise ship had been at sea for a number of days at this point, they had mandated that everyone stay in their in their room and they had limited the services. So the ship wasn't necessarily in the best condition. But the two teams, our two person teams split up and they worked their way through the high risk customers who are designated as COVID likely. And they proceeded to test for about six hours and they did over 50 tests. After they worked their way through the ship, the helicopters flew back out to sea and then recovered the team. Which was then taken to Richmond, California, where the tests were dropped off at a laboratory for assessment. During this time in probably one of the more pivotal moments of our year. We had to deal with and manage how we received our teammates back, with very little understanding of the virus's characteristic. So for those four to six hours while they



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were out to sea, we researched, studied, called anyone we could to get an understanding of how this virus was contracted and what kind of precautions we had to take, both with their equipment and with the people as they return. And I will tell you that it was not easy and it definitely took a lot of times as navigate through. And we certainly had some emotional discussions afterwards, but ultimately we made it through. So as the team landed, we staged a vehicle out on the flight lined with boxes in it. So the team unloaded, put all their gear into these boxes and drove themselves back to our para rescue section where we had an essentially a quarantine line set up. They stage their gear, they cleaned off, they kept the masks on from that point on, and then we either arranged for lodging, or we sent them home to execute a quarantine, for at that time we selected a 14 day. But we basically monitor them from five to six days until they showed no signs or symptoms. Ultimately, the tests showed that a majority of the patients were on that ship or COVID positive that we tested and this event kicked off what we consider kind of the pivotal moment as we cross into the COVID era. Just to highlights since the Grand Princess Mission, under COVID conditions jour wing has continued to conduct search and rescue missions. We've been for Helo SAR's. We supported California fire efforts and civil unrest response within the state. We've also conducted two long range open ocean jump missions. While taking into account the new order of COVID. The bottom line for us. As the team was, that this was a great partnership with the Coast Guard, we had a key enabler from the CDC that made this mission happen and really ensured that our teammates were able to make their way safely through the sequence of events. We gathered crucial data that started to frame how the virus acted in a controlled setting, which would later prove to be beneficial as the world analyzed the virus. And most importantly to us, we demonstrated the full goodness of the Guard, as we executed its homeland mission within California. Sir, that's all I have in regards to the mission. I just wanted to thank you for your time and I'm more than happy to answer more detailed questions after the other speakers. Thank you.

GEN Hokanson

OK, Daryl, over to you.

Maj. Gen. Bohac

Thank you, sir. Major General Daryl Bohac, the adjutant general for the Nebraska National Guard, and as I look back a year ago and think about how our involvement started with COVID-19, that it's really a story about how our partnerships with our communities really matters. And here in Nebraska, the University of Nebraska Medical Center is one of the ten biocontainment unit sites across the nation, and in fact, University of Nebraska had experience dealing with these kinds of issues and helping treat Ebola patients and in fact, received Ebola patients from the continent of Africa back in 2014. My relationship with the University of Nebraska, though, goes back way before I came on board full time with the Nebraska National Guard when I was on the faculty at the medical center with Dr. Chris Kratovil, who's now the director of Global Health Security, is one of his roles that



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at the university and because of that relationship, when the assistant secretary for preparedness and response from the federal Human Health Agency, HHS, contacted the Nebraska Medical Center to see if they could help as our nation began to look to evacuate American citizens and their dependents from the Wuhan Province in China. And Chris picked up the phone and called me and said, Can the Nebraska National Guard help? My answer was yes. Governor Ricketts answer was yes. Let's do what we can. And we were able to identify resources at one of our training sites that had appropriate billeting or lodging facilities that were, in fact, configured in ways in the air handling equipment that allowed us to isolate to certain buildings in certain areas of the buildings that really supported this. This turned into a new operation where the Nebraska National Guard prepared the site for fifty seven guests coming from China and between the medical center and again, the public health staff from the assistant secretary for Preparedness and Response to the US Marshal Service to help provide additional security to a whole team coming together. Really just a great story about Guard relationships, community relationships and how important it is to have those relationships before things happen. And all those guests came, came to our facilities were well received. We had churches wanting to reach out and provide notes and provide support to those folks. And then 14 days later, after they completed their quarantine, they were able to leave. They were all healthy and all left and were able to continue on their journeys to their ultimate destinations here in the United States. So it's really a great, great story from the start for us. We ultimately have put over 20 percent of our force in play to help support all things COVID, COVID here in Nebraska. And that that equates to just shy of 900 Airmen and Soldiers being involved in at different times across the past year. Our peak time for Nebraska was in May when it had about five hundred and thirty three Airmen and Soldiers doing a variety of COVID missions, one of which was our primary election here in Nebraska occurred in May and there were concerns by the secretary of state's office that because we didn't understand COVID people were definitely isolating and making sure they were physically distancing, that we would not get enough poll workers to show up at individual sites. And in order to ensure that every Nebraskan who wanted to vote, we put one hundred and thirty four members on duty in support of the secretary of state. And in fact, we had two locations which wouldn't have opened if we wouldn't have been president. So I think in terms of living out our oath of office, our oath of enlistment, which talks about supporting and defending the Constitution of the United States, and then for us in the National Guard, we also take a second there's a second phrase added into the oath that talks about supporting and defending the Constitution, in our case, the state of Nebraska. And I think we really lived it lived in that moment we've done here in Nebraska. We've done things like warehouse management, call center support, food bank distribution to help address food insecurity issues across the state. Over 150 missions delivering box food, fresh produce to bag food to folks that needed it.



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We've done personal protective equipment distribution and support of the state's efforts to help make sure that out through our public health departments, they have the materials that they needed to support the things you're trying to do in their jurisdictions to today, where our primary response is in vaccination support and not just putting vaccines in our arms. But I just recently visited one of our sites out in central Nebraska, had four soldiers who are supporting the West Central Public Health Department there. And what they bring besides medical expertise to actually vaccinate is logistics and figuring things out and helping these teams figure out how to do mass vaccination site. So they this past week did some vast mass vaccination with one of our public utilities providers to ensure the security of the and the ability to continue to deliver electrical service across the state to one of our railroads. And the Nebraska has a large railroad industry in North Platte, is the largest sorting yard in the world railroad sorting yard. And we're able to go out and do mass vaccination and then also continuing to do support to our Department of Health and Human Services and organizing that response statewide. So we will continue to be involved in Nebraska doing those kinds of things for the foreseeable future, as well as taking care of our taking care of our folks here and our families. And the three things I asked the team to do as we begin to understand COVID-19 better and what it meant, what it meant, and the impacts it was going to have on us was to preserve the health of the force and protect our families and communities and stand ready to serve our state nation wherever we needed. And I'm glad to say we've been able to do that. And I look forward to answering any questions you might have following our next speaker. Thank you.

GEN Hokanson

OK, thank you, Daryl, and now Bret over to you.

MG Daugherty

OK, well, thank you, sir. It's a pleasure to join all of you here this morning. It's been a long year. As General Hokanson mentioned before, Washington State has the dubious honor of identifying the nation's first positive COVID case. And we actually had, of course, one of the nation's first outbreaks at one of our long term care facilities north of Seattle, our care facility there. At that time a year ago, there were a lot of unknowns about this disease. I mean, all we really knew is that we didn't want to get it. So we bumped elbows and we coughed into our shirtsleeves while we still went out to restaurants and bars and shopped at local retail establishments. And we quickly learned that those strategies were not going to slow down the growth of this virus at all. And so essentially, our lives here were turned upside down as the rest of the country has now experienced. But we buckled down from the very get go and work with our emergency management division and also certainly our Department of Health to kind of help come up with a 13 non-pharmaceutical interventions that the CDC was recommending and trying to tweak those for our local authorities to implement. We also requested an active duty field hospital right at the start because we really were uncertain if our



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hospitals were going to be able to handle the workload. So they set up a field hospital in the Seahawks stadium. That was a pretty big deal when Washington State then shut down schools and non-essential businesses. A year ago, our governor first asked the Washington National Guard to help out at food banks. As General Hokanson mentioned, one of the things that we did as we were kind of putting together our food bank program and our 13 non-pharmaceutical interventions and developing the tips for working with FEMA Emergency Management and health is to share all the lessons learned with all of my counterparts across the country. So I was sending out the things that we learned to all my fellow TAGs and also my fellow Homeland Security advisers, because I have that role in our state as well. So we tried to kind of keep people from reinventing the wheel as much as possible. But back to the food banks, with more people that were out of work as we had to do a shutdown here in our state, more families relied on food banks and have ever done so in our state's history. And at the same time, the volunteers who typically do that work at the food banks had to stay home because many of them were elderly and fall into the high risk categories. But a year later, we're still helping out at more than 40 food banks across our state. And I'll tell you, it's a mission that we are exceptionally proud of. To date, we have provided over 80 million pounds of food to our fellow Washingtonians. And as Daryl mentioned, our folks are pretty efficient. In fact, many of the members of our food bank teams are trained in lean management, some from their civilian jobs, and some from the training that we do here within the Washington military department in our efforts to find efficiencies. And so our folks showed up at food banks with these lean management skills and in fact, our food distribution warehouse in Seattle was named as the most efficient food distribution warehouse in the nation. And we thought that was pretty great. And our guys took a lot of pride in that. So while we were busy being effective and efficient, the governor took notice of our efficiency. And before long we were asked them to do other missions. So we transported medical supplies. We assembled COVID-19 test kits which were in short supply back then, we stood up and operated five mobile test sites for COVID testing across our state, we conducted contact tracing or COVID mapping with our Department of Health, and we even had to fall in to the Employment Security Division and help them clear a huge backlog of unemployment claims so that people could actually get the unemployment payments that they desperately needed. In all, over the last year, we've had more than 2,000 Soldiers and Airmen that have been committed to our COVID missions across the state. And now we get to help bring the worldwide pandemic to a close. We hope as the state grew its capacity to run COVID test sites, we were able to transition our test teams to assist with vaccination efforts instead. So I now have teams of very talented men and women supporting our states four mass vaccination sites that's about to grow to six. They're doing everything from taking the patients to actually putting the shots in their arms. Every day, our Soldiers and Airmen help



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to vaccinate thousands of individuals who are now going through our sites. At the same time, we've also pulled together mobile vaccination teams so they're able to get out to our more rural areas or even our inner city areas and focus on older individuals that have a hard time figuring out how to get registered and actually travel to a mass vaccination site. As of a couple of days ago, the National Guard has helped administer nearly 80,000 vaccinations here in our state, and that number continues to climb daily. The governor has set a goal of 45,000 vaccinations per day in our state. And yesterday we finally hit that goal. It's not a matter of our folks being efficient. It's just a matter of the supply of vaccine showing up. Just a little anecdote. One of the very first civilians that we vaccinated was actually former Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis. He surprised everybody by rolling through our Tri-City site in his pickup truck, and we were able to vaccinate the former SECDEF, and that was a highlight for our folks during that day. Thankfully, we actually love this mission. We love what we do. At this point our current operations tempo does not seem to be slowing down one bit, I've been giving everybody the analogy that we're running a mile race here and we're in the gun lab, we're all tired. We've been at it for a while, but we've got to dig deep and we're going to finish strong. So, again, just thanks for the opportunity to be on this panel today and provide you as a snapshot of some of the important work that we're doing. Before I wrap up, I'll just take a minute to ask you to please encourage people not to let up. The men and women of our National Guard across the country have been dedicated to slowing the spread, bending the curve and ending this international disaster. So I'd ask all of the reporters to please help us by doing your part and encouraging your readers and viewers to do the same. Let's get vaccinated. Let's continue to mask up. Let's keep our distance and avoid large gatherings. The different variants are out there. They're more contagious, and it would be awful to give ourselves an additional workload as we're getting so close to finishing this final lap in our race. So I'll wrap it up there. And I look forward to entertaining questions with you at the end. Thank you.

Maj. Allen

OK, thank you so much, everybody. We really appreciate your opening comments. So, first of all, to the AP. Hearing nothing, The Washington Post. So do I have Alex Horton, are you on the line from Maple? OK, hearing nothing, I will go to Fox News. We heard NBC. We've got Alex Horton from the Post, let him so I think he needs to try again. Yeah, get it right. We can hear you thanks Alex.

Alex Horton

Yeah. Thanks for doing this. You know, so we've heard about, you know, the sort of triumphs and accomplishments of the Guard in the past year. And, you know, one thing that comes to mind is that these things do have a cost. General considering you had mentioned that when you said these folks have left their families. They've also left their jobs, professional obligations and their civilian careers, that sort of thing. And what really struck me is your use of how many days



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you've done this last year, which was 10.3 Million days, which would you put that in perspective is about 22,000 years. So this is 22,000 years' worth of time that folks, I've been away from their jobs, their families, their careers and other obligations. So can you speak to the priority you're doing in assessing the impact of that last year and into this year? What are some of the steps are taken to deal with it? And what's your sort of assessment of how much of an impact that made?

GEN Hokanson

Alex, thank you very much for that question. Know, when we look at the entire force, we have 443,000 in the Army, in the Air National Guard. And really the key there is to help us balance their civilian career, their military careers and, of course, their families as well. And what we do is we rely very heavily on our adjutants general like Darrell and Brett to provide us the local feedback from within their state. And I will tell you, I've been very fortunate to visit quite a few of these locations and to talk to the men and women there. I mean, they are very motivated because they see the difference they're making every day. And a lot of them say, you know, this is what they signed up to do. And of course, we have some folks that do need to get back to their civilian careers. And on our chain of command, we think it's doing a really good job of balancing those that need to go back to work or have family things that they need to accomplish and making sure that we get the right number of folks where they're needed most of all. And I think one of the highlights that we're seeing right now is our level of recruiting and retention is beyond where it has been in any time in our recent history. And so we see folks in the communities that see what their National Guard is doing, and they want to be part of that. They want to make a difference. And a lot of those that are doing that, they can literally see the impact they're having in their communities. And they're and they're sticking around. They're signing up for more time. And it's just it's just an incredible impact. And just to be around them and I would encourage if you get a chance to visit some of the sites and just talk to them, because they're amazing people doing amazing things and they see that every day. Thank you.

Alex Horton

Yeah, I don't follow up that I was curious if you did any kind of confidential assessments, because, you know, it's one thing for a four star general to go up to any four and say, how are you doing, son? How do you feel about the mission? The answer you're going to get is going to be completely different than if someone has made an anonymous assessment of how they're being used, how their leadership is valuing their time and their and respecting their time and obligation. So what are you doing to get closer to the ground truth and not the attaboys that you're seeking from the field? ]

GEN Hokanson

So a great thing that I try and do, Alex, when I travel is I try and bring my wife whenever I can and she'll go speak to the spouses. And like you said, a lot of what I get, of course, is tempered. But spouses will tell you exactly the way it is. And



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my wife and I will sit down and have a conversation and I'll tell her what I heard and she'll tell me what she heard from the spouses. And that helps find us, help us find the right balance. I also know my children are all in the military, so I listen to what their feedback is. And our senior enlisted adviser, Tony Whitehead, he and I, when we go places will often split up so that we get different perspectives. Because to your point, at certain levels, you do hear a different story. But for us, ultimately, we rely on our senior enlisted leaders and our leaders at the lowest level, you know, to provide that feedback and if not directly to me, to their adjutants general, so that we can identify what the true cost is. And if there are things that we can do at the national level to help facilitate taking care of them and their families while they're doing what their states and nations have asked them for. But you're right on spot, Alex. I always have to worry about that. And a lot of times I read a lot online or in the newspapers to get another perspective as well, because to me, ultimately, we should be able to answer any question and any type of source that provides me feedback that I may be getting, not getting otherwise. I always want to hear that.

Maj. Allen                      Thank you so much, sir. We'll go back to Fox if I see somebody in the back there, but FOX News you on. Still nothing heard. We'll go to CNN. Hold on one second, I do have a question for you. Sorry about the dog.

Ellie Kaufman                      This is Ellie Kaufman with CNN. My question for you is, why don't I type it in the box?

Mrs. O'Grady                      It's all right. We all have pets and babies and we understand that, Ellie.

Ellie Kaufman                      But my question for you is, have you guys received this request from U.S. Capitol Police to extend National Guard support on Capitol Hill? And do you have an estimate of how many National Guard members will stay for the next two months? And just like a sense of if there are other perceived threats or if this is just protective?

Mrs. O'Grady                      This is Tracy, I think that's a better question until the decisions are made for Mr. John Kirby, who I understand is doing a presser right after this. So I ask that you ask him until the decisions are made and then next week, if that becomes a hot topic throughout this media roundtable, we'll do a separate media roundtable just on DC support.

Ellie Kaufman                      Very fair. Thank you. Thank you.

Maj. Allen                      Al Jazeera. Anybody from Al Jazeera, Alan?

Jillian Adams                      No, ma'am, but it looks like we've got Joe Fulsom from Fox. Oh, good. Go ahead,



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Maj. Allen Washington Times, Mike Glen? I'm good, thanks, ask at the end.

Maj. Allen OK, great, thank you, sir. NBC News Chopper. All right, nothing hurt NBC Priscila Thompson. Nothing heard Megan Myers.

Megan Myers Hey, so I wanted to ask about some of the Guardsmen who are manning COBRA vaccination sites, especially the FEMA coordinated ones, I was talking to an airman in Los Angeles last week who said she didn't know how long she would be there, but it could be through September. And I was wondering if there are any plans or any guidance to rotate some of these support personnel at vaccine sites so that they're not spending nine months or however long at the sites.

GEN Hokanson So, Brett or Daryl, that either you have a comment related to that, since you guys are right there.

MG Daugherty Sure, I'll comment, you know, we do have a limited number of medics, so that is a challenge for us. We don't have a real deep pool, but we are trying to hold back a little bit of a reserve so that we can rotate people through. Where it's most critical for us right now is in the providers, the physician's assistants and the actual in the doctors. And so in some cases, we're anticipating that we will have to rotate our folks out and perhaps lean on our Department of Health to help us and also our emergency management division to identify civilians to come in and kind of backfill us as we let our folks get back typically to their to their private practice. But it is on our radar. We are working on a plan and we've got some capability to do that. And we are talking with our folks all the time, making sure that we're not burning them out and that we're not getting them into hot water with their civilian employers. It's a great question. I appreciate it. Thanks.

Megan Myers Thanks. I want to follow up real quickly to be specific, because the airmen I was talking to at that site and at other FEMA sites, the medical providers are active duty medics, active duty nurses. She's a drone crew chief and she's there on the iPad. She's there waving people through. So my question is for troops of all kinds of backgrounds who don't have that expertise, who are there to be a body and to help out? Is it possible to rotate some of those people more easily?

MG Daugherty Yeah, absolutely. Those are those are fairly easy for us to rotate. And, you know, one thing I want to point out is that we have tried very hard to handle as much of this workload as we can using volunteers from within our formations. And when a lot of folks lost their jobs in the civilian world, we'll guess what a lot of them were in the National Guard as well. So I do have a pool of people who are really happy to have the work to be working for the National Guard in and out at food banks



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and vaccination sites. And so we do try to rotate people as much as we can. And so far, for us, it just hasn't been an issue. But we don't have a FEMA site here. This is all just us taking care of our own people.

Maj. Gen. Bohac

I'd like to chime in here, too, on Bret's comments, visits, he's exactly right, we're doing the same thing. We rotate people on and off mission. And I suspect the airmen that you talked to is accurately reflecting the fact that we currently under the FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency mission assignment process, have authority to put people on orders up through the end of September. But whether or not an individual is another matter. And I think all the adjutants general are pretty sensitive to balancing the volunteerism against their family life and their work life. And quite frankly, in the guard, we can't do we can't do our mission without doing that balancing. And I suspect if that airman would identify that she needed to return to her regular employment or other things that would be accommodated. Thank you.

Maj. Allen

Thank you, gentlemen. We're going to move on to CBS News. So I have anyone from CBS.

Ellie Watson

Yeah, hi, it's Ellie Watson. I just have a quick question on, I guess, the protocol for quarantining and testing positive. What are your guardsmen do when they test positive? And what do the people who have been in contact with them do? Do they have to quarantine or are they I guess what is the protocol?

GEN Hokanson

So, Bret or Darryl, do you want to jump in on there with your personal experiences over?

Maj. Gen. Bohac

Yes, sir, I can. I can start with this one. So we have an active case management cell that deals with the exposures and positives and to include presumptive positives based on symptoms presentation. So these are PAs and nurses that essentially do an intake when we identify a case and then using CDC and public health guidelines, we make recommendations based on how they present to whether or not they need to isolate and or quarantine or self-assess. And so we we've been quite active in doing that here in Nebraska. And I would tell you that over time, I'm just going to look at a slide really quick. We've had 475 positives since last since this COVID-19 thing emerged out. But currently today we only have only have 10. We also then instruct the service members on how what the impacts should be in their family and in their homes and how to deal with that. So it's a very active process because we have to, again, preserve the health of our force in order to have them ready to respond, but also so that they remain viable in their communities and their families. Thanks.



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MG Daugherty

I'll chime in as well. We have something very similar to what Darryl just described. We have a joint task force headquarters that manages all of the folks that we have deployed in our COVID response missions. And so there's a there's a whole protocol established for when somebody comes down with symptoms or has been near somebody else who is tested positive. And we do the same type of exhaustive evaluation about isolation or quarantine and also taking into account whether they are working out of a hotel room, if they're remote or if they're working from home, then we have to also recommend that families take the appropriate action as well. So we're all over that.

GEN Hokanson

And if I could just add from here on the Pentagon, obviously, we take this extremely seriously, and any time that anyone comes up positive, they will do contact tracing to find anybody they interacted with and then we would all go to the 14 day isolation protocol. And so we've done a very good job of managing that here. And if at any time anyone feels any of the symptoms, we make sure that we get them tested immediately and isolated and then also until we find out if it's positive or negative. But obviously, we you know, when you look at all that, the great work that's being done around the country, we still have incredible requirements around the globe and throughout the entire 2020, the National Guard, we didn't miss a single of our scheduled overseas deployments. And sometimes that that reached up to 25,000 or even 30,000 folks at one time and we were able to make sure that they got their training completed. They either isolated before they deployed or afterwards, but we were able to accomplish all of our missions throughout this process.

Maj. Allen

Thank you, everybody. I'll go to Politico, Lara Seligman. Nothing heard. Tara Copp from McClatchy. OK, nothing heard Matthew Cox, military dotcom. OK, nothing heard Axios.

Kadia Goba

All right, thank you for joining us. So I just wanted to confirm that case management system that you have at the Pentagon, does that apply to Capitol police officers or I should say, members that are stationed at Capitol Police? And do you have a national account as to how many members have tested positive since the coronavirus? I heard one officer say four hundred and seventy five in Nebraska. And I was just curious if you have a total count and if that number has declined since the beginning of come on the virus. Thank you.

GEN Hokanson

Specifically, I was only talking about protocols here within the Pentagon and our workforce that works here in our major headquarters. And with



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respect to numbers, I can't give specific numbers, but it has decreased significantly over time. And obviously, even as we look at now as we vaccinate and what we have learned has really helped us to reduce the numbers. And, of course, we'll continue to do everything we can to get those numbers down to where they're hopefully zero one day. ]

Maj. Allen

Thank you, sir. Air Force magazine.

Jennifer-Leigh Oprihory

Thank you so much for taking the time today, everyone. My question is primarily Hokanson, but it also I would love to have it fielded by the state based leaders. So General Tolba from the Joint Staff recently testified that approximately one third of U.S. troops had declined to COVID vaccine for one reason or another. So I was hoping you could tell us where the take rates for MGB overall and for your respective states stand, how each of you are tracking take rate data. So at the national level and in the individual states. And how, if at all, are MGB and the states respectively tackling the stigma surrounding vaccination? Thank you.

GEN Hokanson

So I guess we don't track that at the national level. Really, our adjutants general do that. A lot of times they really focus on their educational efforts. And so, Darryl and Brett, I know you guys are dealing with this firsthand. Is there anything that you guys would like to say?

MG Daugherty

Here, I'll jump in, I'm tracking this pretty much on a daily basis, we're right now right around thirty nine percent of our force that has opted into to get vaccinated. And so we have to walk a fine line. We're not actually allowed to encourage people to take the vaccine, even though I would love to do that. I don't. And so we just try to educate people on the potential benefits of getting the vaccine. And we're doing the best we can to let people know that we've got a vaccine available and that there are some good points for opting in. But I can't I can't go beyond that to the point where I would appear to be having undue command influence and telling people to get vaccinated because it's not it's not a requirement yet. So that's what we're doing here.

Maj. Gen. Bohac

So; very similar in Nebraska as General Doctor you just outlined, what we do is a series of education events using Facebook and YouTube streaming services to get the word out. One of the great things for us here in Nebraska is my senior Army National Guard surgeon general is a critical care pulmonologist here in Nebraska. And so he's the ideal expert to talk about the impacts of the disease, but also to make an assessment of the vaccine and to provide people information. So we've actually done some myth



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busting kinds of outreach and then we also put medical teams out to the formations and make them available to do Q&A, which I think is the most important strategy that we have right now. Overall, we've got about a 30 percent take rate, but that number is skewed a little bit because, for example, here in Nebraska, I have Army National Guard formations in twenty three different communities. And so it takes time to get to them to get the vaccine to those appropriate locations and give soldiers the opportunity. And that's reflected in in the difference between the Air National Guard here in Nebraska is primarily in one location where we have the perspective of airmen taking the vaccine. It is forty two percent contrasted to the soldiers, 20 percent. But here in the month of March, we're going to we have a fairly aggressive campaign of making vaccine available to those who wish to voluntarily take it. And I think it's just some uncertainty. And that's where education really plays the primary role, as General Hokanson talked about. Thank you

Mrs. O'Grady

Hey, Jillian, can you throw up the placards that we've been using from the vaccine campaign perspective? So Jillian is going to pop something up here that we've had a lot of success with, and it's a placard that people hold and take selfies with when they get their vaccinations. I'm getting vaccinated for. And we found that that is really gained a lot of community support because they want to be there for each other. They want to be in this together. And then the other thing we're seeing at the state level is we're seeing them hold town halls inside the National Guard and they immediately see those numbers jump, which you would expect. The more informed you are about the vaccine, the more comfortable you're going to feel with it

Jennifer-Leigh Ophory

Wonderful. And then, if I may, a quick follow up for General Hokanson and our state based generals. From your conversations with our troops, what have you anecdotally learned about people's reasons for declining the shot since in a recent interview with Lieutenant Morelo, he said that a lot of what he's heard, it's not just people necessarily being anti vax. Some people just think that they don't deserve a chance at a shot before more high risk loved ones.

GEN Hokanson

Yes, so there's a there's a lot of different reasons out there, and one of the things that we find from most states, though, is initially when they when they provide the education, like Darryl mentioned, and talk to them about the process. And then also if you look at we're in March now, it won't really be until later in April that we've actually had enough vaccinations for each and every one of our Guardsmen. So we're still, like our civilian



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communities, have a limited supply and, of course, that's increasing daily. It won't be until later on that we really know. And so between now and then, the best we can do is things like Daryl's doing in Nebraska. And I know many other states are doing that, is having town halls and allowing Soldiers and Airmen to ask questions and also to educate them and really talk to them about the benefits of the vaccination and also the, you know, the concerns that we're seeing with the disease itself.

Maj. Allen

So we are just about out of time to go ahead and wrap up with any closing comments.

GEN Hokanson

I'd really like to just kind of go back to a lot of the stuff that's already been said in terms of from Daryl, Bret and Seth as well as is really your help in getting the word out is really one of the things that may have the greatest impact for us, where they're supporting our communities any way we can. And as more and more vaccinations become available, I think our capability to impact our communities is going to continue to go up. We're at just under 30,000 people right now doing about 135,000 shots a day. We think we can get up to close to two hundred and fifty thousand a day in terms of shots. And of course, our communities are even doing much more than that. And as the vaccine becomes more available, we look to do our part in any way we can to help get that out there and then hopefully get on the back side of this and get our folks back to their families and their civilian careers and building readiness for our nation's armed forces

Maj. Allen

Thank you, sir. I want to thank everybody for their time. And if you have any follow up questions or you need anything further from us, you have the National Guard media desk team. Go ahead and step out there. We'll get it back out. Thank you, everybody. Really appreciate your time.

**[End of Audio]**

**Duration: 57 minutes**

**A link to the recorded Zoom MRT: <https://youtu.be/9hcgHfY2KzI>**

**Vaccine sign video:**

**<https://twitter.com/USNationalGuard/status/1356648575040581632>**



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**Video of Maj. Gen. Daryl L. Bohac getting his COVID-19 vaccination:**

**<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/780573/nebraska-senior-leaders-receive-covid-19-vaccine>**

**If there are any follow-up questions please feel free to contact the National Guard Bureau Media Operations at 703-601-6767.**

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